

## **WISCONSIN FRESH START PROGRAM (WFS)**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Governor and Legislature created the Wisconsin Fresh Start (WFS) Program in 1998. This program is a hands-on construction-related training program that prepares at-risk young people ages 16 to 24 to become self-sufficient, productive citizens. It also expands the supply of affordable, energy-efficient housing in rural Wisconsin communities and urban neighborhoods. The program is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Commerce's Division of Housing and Community Development. WFS is based on the successful Madison based Operation Fresh Start Inc. service model. Current sponsoring organizations include nonprofit organizations, community action agencies and a housing authority.

### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Youth Support Services include the following components:

Counseling: Individual and peer counseling, group sessions, case management, and referrals to outside agencies.

Education: Academic skills, GED preparation, vocational skills, job/college readiness skills, leadership development, construction theory and terminology, driver's education, follow-up education and cultural events.

Leadership Development: Decision-making, speaking, group facilitation, negotiating, community service, retreats and advocacy.

Construction Training: Supervised construction training, employer expectations, job readiness skills, vocational education training, and coordination with pre-apprenticeship programs.

Graduate Resources: School admission counseling, pre-employment training, career counseling, and integration into apprenticeship programs, job search, job development/job placement and follow-up counseling/support.

### **FUNDING**

Funding for Wisconsin Fresh Start comes from the following sources: Wisconsin Department of Administration (Focus on Energy); Wisconsin Department of Corrections – Division of Community Corrections; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HOME funds); Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority and local community funds from school districts, local foundations and governments.

### **SUCCESS RATE**

The program enrolls at a dozen local sites across the state, 150 members each year, with over 80% of these members receiving their high school diploma or an HSED equivalent, basic skills competency or increase of two grade levels. Of the youth enrolled 70% have completed the program and have achieved self-sufficiency as defined by self-supporting employment, no further criminal justice contacts and enrollment in post-secondary education.

WFS completes 11 to 15 affordable housing units annually, benefiting first time homebuyers or renters who earn less than 80% of their county's median income.

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